

Why Were Feminists So Silent After 10/7? And Why Are They Still Silent?

By Phyllis Chesler

I feel that I've been writing versions of this piece for the last year. And yes, I am weary of this subject—but not as weary or as traumatized as Israelis must be after a year and almost a month of being attacked, wounded, displaced, murdered, kidnapped—and blamed for having provoked Iran.



The Rape of the Sabine Women
By Peter Paul Rubens

To date, the shameful feminist silence continues, heels dug right in.

In this issue of the estimable journal, Dr. Catherine

Chatterley, the Editor of Antisemitism Studies, focuses on the immediate denials of sexual violence—despite or because just such violence had occurred. In her article, Dr. Amy Elman correctly refers to the silent ones as “feminist impersonators.” For a long while, I’ve described them as “faux feminists.” Doing so, gives me no pleasure. Here’s a necessary perspective: Academics, leading literary lights, international organizations, politicians, the media, have not only remained silent—they have actively blamed Israel for daring to defend herself.

Educated, progressive, pro-woman advocates ought to be better than the common herd but they aren’t.

How did a globalized version of Stalinism trump their feminist ideals? How could these “feminist impersonators” have chosen gender over sex based rights; become so invested in the legalization of surrogacy and in trans rights over and above women’s rights; queer and bi rights over and above the rights of women not to be raped, beaten, trafficked, honor killed, tortured, and murdered?

But mainly, why are so many radical feminists so hard-hearted against Israel? So inclined to believe the worst about the Jewish state when the allegations are simply not true?

I wrote this piece in the summer of 2024. In the hope that this abbreviated timeline may be of use, in case you haven’t already read all about it, I share it with you.

Why Were Feminists Silent After October 7?

Fall, 2024

Antisemitism Studies Vol. 8, No. 2

By Phyllis Chesler

In the early 1970s, I experienced antisemitism among leftwing and lesbian feminists. It was not political. I was told that

Jews like me were too pushy, too smart, too sexy, and were taking over the movement. Such views sent me straight to Israel. A small group including myself, Aviva Cantor Zuckoff, the founder of *Lilith Magazine*, and Cheryl Moch held a press conference on the subject of antisemitism; for years, we tried to interest leading Jewish feminists in joining us to discuss the problem. At the time, neither Andrea Dworkin nor Letty Cottin Pogrebin were interested in such a discussion.

In the mid-1970s, I tried to get feminist signatures for petitions against the UN's resolution that Zionism equals racism. Some signed, but many feminists refused to do so. I explained that anti-Zionism equals racism. I got nowhere with the feminist Marxists or with others who hated Jews for more personal reasons. I also began working with Israeli feminists in Haifa, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv, and taking American journalists to Israel in the hope that they would modify or expand their views. And they did.

Later, in 2005, I published a book titled *The Death of Feminism*. At the time, I was focused on how Western feminists were more obsessed with the alleged occupation of a country that has never existed—Palestine—than with the real occupation of women's bodies in Gaza and the West Bank, who were being forced into wearing the hijab and niqab, into child and arranged marriages, and who were being honor killed by their families for minor or imagined infractions. This form of femicide is primarily a Muslim-on-Muslim crime both in the West and in Muslim countries, but, to a lesser extent, also takes place among Hindus in India, and, less frequently, among Sikhs. Honor killing is probably a tribal custom that religious leaders have failed to abolish. Women also collaborate in honor killings. For saying so, both Stalinized and Palestinianized feminists and rabid Islamists denounced me as an "Islamophobe" for prioritizing the rights of women of color over and above the rights of the men (and women) of color who were terrorizing and even killing them. I was also

condemned as a “Zionist” for questioning the sacredness of Palestinian victimhood.

Thus, I may have been among a handful of people who were not surprised by the feminist silence about Hamas’s 10/7 pogromon-steroids. It does not ease my sorrow that so many others, including the worldwide media and professoriate, human rights groups, and the United Nations, are also actively engaging in 10/7 denialism, as well as in relentless and vicious blood libels against the Jewish state every single day.

By the late afternoon of 10/7, I was a cognitive warrior on fire. Between October 11, 2023 and March 19, 2024, I published 28 articles on the subject and was interviewed about 10 times. Feminist allies did not respond to the articles I sent them about their shameful, even unbearable, silence. Perhaps they felt that Israel deserved what it got but were too embarrassed to say that to me. Instead, they said nothing. In my view, what Hamas did was influenced by the most violent pornography—feminists should have been the first people to recognize this.

While women and men have been routinely and horrifyingly raped in numerous war zones (Bangladesh, Bosnia, Congo, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Sudan, Ukraine), and although Western feminists have done little to ameliorate their suffering, at least they did not cheer for the gang-rapists and condemn their victims.

Once Hamas/Iran unleashed the horror of 10/7, I understood that the world would never be the same, at least not for Israelis, and not for Jews who care about Israeli and Jewish survival.

I also understood that 10/7 advanced the prospect of World War Three between the Judeo-Christian West and those who yearn for a global Islamic caliphate.

On October 12, the radical feminist group, Women’s Declaration International, whose views I share, published a statement in

which they said: "Like many, we watched in horror as Hamas invaded southern Israel, raping Jewish women and girls, murdering innocent civilians, and taking (civilians) hostage . . . We are disgusted to see reports of Americans championing the cause of Hamas . . . around the globe."

On October 13, I sent all my articles to Gloria Steinem with a note asking her to "help." She responded at once and said she would "ask the Feminist Majority folks (who publish *Ms.*) if they have responded." It took *Ms. Magazine* two months before they published anything and when they did it left everything to be desired.

As I was writing about 10/7, I was inundated by the sights and sounds of protesters on my screens and in my city (New York). They were marching for Hamas! The sight of Jewish blood had thrilled them and unleashed their murderousness. They were marching across the streets of America, both women and men—for "Palestine." Everywhere, anarchists, Islamists, lesbians, queers, feminists, and leftists were creating an auditory nightmare with their drummers, whistle-blowers, and megaphones. They chanted incessantly, carried Palestinian flags, wore keffiyehs, shut down bridges, tunnels, and train stations, terrified children in cancer hospitals, physically and verbally attacked those who were visibly Jewish, both in universities, on the streets, in restaurants, and at home.

I did not hear these pro-Hamas marchers, especially the lesbian, queer, and feminist protesters, calling for an end to rape, woman-battering, or the persecution of homosexuals and queers in Gaza. I saw no signs that condemned honor killing or polygamy. No one called for reproductive freedom for American women or for an Equal Rights Amendment. No leading American feminist or longtime feminist ally reached out to me. Leading American feminist experts on violence against women, including rape and rape trauma syndrome, remained silent.

On October 23, dozens of Israeli women's groups, and some

Jewish groups, asked UN Women to issue a statement. They wrote: "It is unthinkable that a UN agency responsible for women's rights ignores the abduction of women, babies, girls, children, and men . . . and the murder of over a thousand civilians." By this point, only Western conservatives, Israelis, and some Jews had stood up for the murdered, tortured, and kidnapped victims of 10/7.

On October 26, Gloria Steinem's assistant described the articles that I kept sending as "wonderful," but emailed me that: "Right now, she's [Gloria] scaling back on all projects and affiliations, particularly outside of her true expertise, in service of her own writing, so can't be of much more help here, but we will happily continue to read and support anything you send. Thanks." Gloria is nearly 90 years old, and this may be true. No matter what, we go back, and I retain a sentimental affection for her.

On October 27, the UN's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) issued a vague statement concerning "the gender dimension of the conflict." They wrote: "The Committee calls upon all parties to systematically address the gender dimension of conflict. It is deeply concerned that the gendered dimensions of the conflict will be significantly exacerbated for women who are internally displaced." I've never read such a clear statement—have you?

On December 4, 58 days after the pogrom, the mainstream (left-liberal) media began to cover the massacre. On December 6, *Ms. Magazine* finally provided a "reading list" about the rape of women in many war zones, such as, the Congo, Ethiopia, Yemen, Syria, Ukraine, and focused on women's attempts to "wage peace." In 1995, in *On the Issues* magazine, I wrote: "Survivors are haunted by those who heard their screams but turned their backs; those who blamed the victim and collaborated with the rapist/torturer/killer; those who minimized, or exaggerated, or merely misunderstood what rape or torture is about; those who preached, authoritatively,

righteously, against revenge, but envisioned no justice.”

Perhaps, it was now *safe* enough for Democratic Party officials and feminist leaders to issue a statement. And they soon did so.

On or around December 10, women leaders and Democratic Party elected functionaries in New York State published a statement. I was told that work on this statement began on November 29, and that it took seven days to compose. When I called one of the organizers, a very hard-working and decent feminist, I asked if her group had reached out to feminists who had declined to sign it. She said yes. She was reluctant to share the names. I laughed and mentioned some names. She was ever so surprised. For example, not a single member of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women had signed. Here is some of their language, which explains why it took seven days to craft the desired even-handed document:

“We grieve as we witness the heartbreaking anguish of women, children, and all those who suffer through no fault of their own in both Israel and Gaza. We mourn the deaths of so many Palestinian and Israeli civilians who have been killed in this war. We long for a just peace. To denounce rape as a weapon of war is not to express approval or alignment with the governing coalition in Israel, nor does it signal support for the bombings in Gaza. But as feminists we are committed to the universal principle that rape must always be condemned; we bear witness to the mountain of evidence that Hamas and other terrorist groups used rape as a weapon of war against Israeli women and girls; and we demand accountability for crimes that must never be tolerated by the world community. Most of all, we stand with the victims of gender-based atrocities, with the survivors and with those who did not survive, and we raise our voices in solidarity with them.”

On December 12, Biden’s White House condemned Hamas’s refusal to return hostages and their use of rape to terrorize. The

White House stated: "In the weeks since October 7, survivors and witnesses have bravely shared accounts of severe sexual violence by Hamas terrorists against women and children in Israel." Formerly silent Democrats now began to "own" the story. Did they want to be able to claim that they had stood up for Israel to impress pro- Israel voters? Going forward, would the December 10 statement and Letty Cottin Pogrebin's December 5 article allow pro-Biden Democrats to claim that they *had* decried the 10/7 rapes?

On December 15, the Marxist-feminist Katha Pollitt followed Letty's example and challenged the feminist silence in a piece published by *The Nation*. Like Letty, Katha herself had been silent for many months. She wrote: "This silence sits oddly with how quick our movement has been to credit much iffier claims and to raise consciousness around sexual misconduct that falls far short of rape. What happened to the clarion call to 'believe women'? What happened to #metoo? Where's the Women's March? Feminist Majority? The National Women's Studies Association?"

On December 19, 73 days after the massacre, *Ms. Magazine* posted an article that mentioned all victims of gender-based violence (GBV) in conflicts in Afghanistan, Congo, Ethiopia, Iran, South Sudan, Sudan, Ukraine, and Yemen. Geeta Rao Gupta wrote: "We are deeply concerned by the increased risk of GBV for women and girls in Gaza and the West Bank as a result of displacement, among other factors." This article only mentioned Israel in the fourth paragraph, and then only as part of a sentence about both Palestinian and Israeli women. They were trying to normalize (or hide) what happened on 10/7 by merging it with other rapes in conflict zones.

On January 31, Sheryl Sandberg, hosted by Lord Mendelsson, chaired an event in the House of Lords titled: "Stand Against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the October 7th Hamas Terror Attack." Allow me to give Sandberg the last word. She said: "On October 7th, Hamas terrorists committed unspeakable

acts of sexual violence against women and girls in Israel, and continued to abuse female hostages that it kept in captivity. Today, the Israeli women who are still being held hostage in Gaza continue to face this terror . . . the evidence is undeniable. We must come together to stand against rape as a weapon of war in conflict zones everywhere; Israel is no exception. If we do not, we risk losing 30 years of human rights in progress.

First published in Phyllis' Newsletter